

LAGUNA BLANCA SCHOOL
SUMMER READING/WRITING 2026 FOR STUDENTS ENTERING
Literature of the American West 11/12 English Seminar

All Laguna Blanca students entering Grades 5-12 in the fall are required to read books this summer. Because the reading will form the basis for class discussion and writing assignments in English classes during the opening weeks of school, we ask that students use a pen/pencil to do a close reading. A close reading means to make notes in the margins, mark confusing and/or favorite passages, highlight interesting information, and comment on significant language. **Please buy only new books or used books that have no marking in them at all.** The books (the specific required edition as indicated by the ISBN # listed below) can be purchased at Chaucer's Bookstore, 3321 State Street, Loreto Plaza, Santa Barbara, CA. I also encourage you to look for the book on Thriftbooks online for a discounted price.

Regardless of which specific 11th/12th English Seminar you are enrolled in, all of the Seminars will do an assignment connected to the required Summer Reading text at the start of the year. If you end up switching Seminar sections during Add/Drop, do not worry! The required summer reading text you read for any of the English Seminars will work for the opening assignment in all of the sections, regardless of the specific class/text. Just ensure you have fully completed the summer reading for one of the Seminars; choose the Seminar class that you think you are most likely to be enrolled in.

REQUIRED READING Please read the following book. Take careful annotations to use for the in-class essay at the beginning of the year.

Tortilla Curtain

By T.C. Boyle

ISBN: 9780140238280

Topanga Canyon is home to two couples on a collision course. Los Angeles liberals Delaney and Kyra Mossbacher lead an ordered sushi-and-recycling existence in a newly gated hilltop community: he a sensitive nature writer, she an obsessive realtor. Mexican illegals Cándido and América Rincón desperately cling to their vision of the American Dream as they fight off starvation in a makeshift camp deep in the ravine. And from the moment a freak accident brings Cándido and Delaney into intimate contact, these four and their opposing worlds gradually intersect in what becomes a tragicomedy of error and misunderstanding.

INDEPENDENT READING Please choose a book from the list below to read over the summer.

Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen

When Jacob Jankowski, recently orphaned and suddenly adrift, jumps onto a passing train, he enters a world of freaks, drifters, and misfits, a second-rate circus struggling to survive during the Great Depression, making one-night stands in town after

endless town. A veterinary student who almost earned his degree, Jacob is put in charge of caring for the circus menagerie. It is there that he meets Marlena, the beautiful young star of the equestrian act, who is married to August, the charismatic but twisted animal trainer. He also meets Rosie, an elephant who seems untrainable until he discovers a way to reach her.

Beautifully written, *Water for Elephants* is illuminated by a wonderful sense of time and place. It tells a story of a love between two people that overcomes incredible odds in a world in which even love is a luxury that few can afford.

***Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* by Lisa See**

In nineteenth-century China, in a remote Hunan county, a girl named Lily, at the tender age of seven, is paired with a laotong, “old same,” in an emotional match that will last a lifetime. The laotong, Snow Flower, introduces herself by sending Lily a silk fan on which she’s painted a poem in nu shu, a unique language that Chinese women created in order to communicate in secret, away from the influence of men.

As the years pass, Lily and Snow Flower send messages on fans, compose stories on handkerchiefs, reaching out of isolation to share their hopes, dreams, and accomplishments. Together, they endure the agony of foot-binding, and reflect upon their arranged marriages, shared loneliness, and the joys and tragedies of motherhood. The two find solace, developing a bond that keeps their spirits alive. But when a misunderstanding arises, their deep friendship suddenly threatens to tear apart.

***Lace Reader* by Brunonia Barry**

Look into the lace... When the eyes begin to fill with tears and the patience is long exhausted, there will appear a glimpse of something not quite seen... In this moment, an image will begin to form... in the space between what is real and what is only imagined.

Can you read your future in a piece of lace? All of the Whitney women can. But the last time Towner read, it killed her sister and nearly robbed Towner of her own sanity. Vowing never to read lace again, her resolve is tested when faced with the mysterious, unsolvable disappearance of her beloved Great Aunt Eva, Salem’s original Lace Reader. Told from opposing and often unreliable perspectives, the story engages the reader’s own beliefs. Should we listen to Towner, who may be losing her mind for the second time? Or should we believe John Rafferty, a no nonsense New York detective, who ran away from the city to a simpler place only to find himself inextricably involved in a psychic tug of war with all three generations of Whitney women? Does either have the whole story? Or does the truth lie somewhere in the swirling pattern of the lace?

***Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut**

Kurt Vonnegut’s masterpiece, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is “a desperate, painfully honest attempt to confront the monstrous crimes of the twentieth century” (Time).

Selected by the Modern Library as one of the 100 best novels of all time

Slaughterhouse-Five, an American classic, is one of the world's great antiwar books. Centering on the infamous World War II firebombing of Dresden, the novel is the result of what Kurt Vonnegut described as a twenty-three-year struggle to write a book about what he had witnessed as an American prisoner of war. It combines historical fiction, science fiction, autobiography, and satire in an account of the life of Billy Pilgrim, a barber's son turned draftee turned optometrist turned alien abductee. As Vonnegut had, Billy experiences the destruction of Dresden as a POW. Unlike Vonnegut, he experiences time travel, or coming "unstuck in time."

An instant bestseller, Slaughterhouse-Five made Kurt Vonnegut a cult hero in American literature, a reputation that only strengthened over time, despite his being banned and censored by some libraries and schools for content and language. But it was precisely those elements of Vonnegut's writing—the political edginess, the genre-bending inventiveness, the frank violence, the transgressive wit—that have inspired generations of readers not just to look differently at the world around them but to find the confidence to say something about it. Authors as wide-ranging as Norman Mailer, John Irving, Michael Crichton, Tim O'Brien, Margaret Atwood, Elizabeth Strout, David Sedaris, Jennifer Egan, and J. K. Rowling have all found inspiration in Vonnegut's words. Jonathan Safran Foer has described Vonnegut as "the kind of writer who made people—young people especially—want to write." George Saunders has declared Vonnegut to be "the great, urgent, passionate American writer of our century, who offers us . . . a model of the kind of compassionate thinking that might yet save us from ourselves."

More than fifty years after its initial publication at the height of the Vietnam War, Vonnegut's portrayal of political disillusionment, PTSD, and postwar anxiety feels as relevant, darkly humorous, and profoundly affecting as ever, an enduring beacon through our own era's uncertainties.

***The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky**

This haunting novel about the dilemma of passivity vs. passion marks the stunning debut of a provocative new voice in contemporary fiction: *The Perks of Being A Wallflower*.

This is the story of what it's like to grow up in high school. More intimate than a diary, Charlie's letters are singular and unique, hilarious and devastating. We may not know where he lives. We may not know to whom he is writing. All we know is the world he shares. Caught between trying to live his life and trying to run from it puts him on a strange course through uncharted territory. The world of first dates and mixed tapes, family dramas and new friends. The world of sex, drugs, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, when all one requires is that the perfect song on that perfect drive to feel infinite.

Through Charlie, Stephen Chbosky has created a deeply affecting coming-of-age story, a powerful novel that will spirit you back to those wild and poignant roller coaster days known as growing up.

***Stones Into Schools* by Greg Mortenson & David Oliver Relin**

From the author of the #1 bestseller *Three Cups of Tea*, the continuing story of this determined humanitarian's efforts to promote peace through education.

In this dramatic first-person narrative, Greg Mortenson picks up where *Three Cups of Tea* left off in 2003, recounting his relentless, ongoing efforts to establish schools for girls in Afghanistan; his extensive work in Azad Kashmir and Pakistan after a massive earthquake hit the region in 2005; and the unique ways he has built relationships with Islamic clerics, militia commanders, and tribal leaders. He shares for the first time his broader vision to promote peace through education and literacy, as well as touching on military matters, Islam, and women—all woven together with the many rich personal stories of the people who have been involved in this remarkable two-decade humanitarian effort.

Since the 2006 publication of *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson has traveled across the U.S. and the world to share his vision with hundreds of thousands of people. He has met with heads of state, top military officials, and leading politicians who all seek his advice and insight. The continued phenomenal success of *Three Cups of Tea* proves that there is an eager and committed audience for Mortenson's work and message.

***Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok**

When Kimberly Chang and her mother emigrate from Hong Kong to Brooklyn squalor, she quickly begins a secret double life: exceptional schoolgirl during the day, Chinatown sweatshop worker in the evenings. Disguising the more difficult truths of her life like the staggering degree of her poverty, the weight of her family's future resting on her shoulders, or her secret love for a factory boy who shares none of her talent or ambition. Kimberly learns to constantly translate not just her language but herself back and forth between the worlds she straddles.

Through Kimberly's story, author Jean Kwok, who also emigrated from Hong Kong as a young girl, brings to the page the lives of countless immigrants who are caught between the pressure to succeed in America, their duty to their family, and their own personal desires, exposing a world that we rarely hear about.

Written in an indelible voice that dramatizes the tensions of an immigrant girl growing up between two cultures, surrounded by a language and world only half understood, *Girl in Translation* is an unforgettable and classic novel of an American immigrant—a moving tale of hardship and triumph, heartbreak and love, and all that gets lost in translation.

***The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath**

The Bell Jar chronicles the crack-up of Esther Greenwood: brilliant, beautiful, enormously talented, and successful, but slowly going under—maybe for the last time. Sylvia Plath masterfully draws the reader into Esther's breakdown with such intensity that Esther's insanity becomes completely real and even rational, as probable and accessible an experience as going to the movies. Such deep penetration into the

dark and harrowing corners of the psyche is an extraordinary accomplishment and has made *The Bell Jar* a haunting American classic.

***East of Eden* by John Steinbeck**

In his journal, Nobel Prize winner John Steinbeck called *East of Eden* “the first book,” and indeed it has the primordial power and simplicity of myth. Set in the rich farmland of California’s Salinas Valley, this sprawling and often brutal novel follows the intertwined destinies of two families—the Trasks and the Hamiltons—whose generations helplessly reenact the fall of Adam and Eve and the poisonous rivalry of Cain and Abel.

Adam Trask came to California from the East to farm and raise his family on the new rich land. But the birth of his twins, Cal and Aaron, brings his wife to the brink of madness, and Adam is left alone to raise his boys to manhood. One boy thrives nurtured by the love of all those around him; the other grows up in loneliness enveloped by a mysterious darkness.

First published in 1952, *East of Eden* is the work in which Steinbeck created his most mesmerizing characters and explored his most enduring themes: the mystery of identity, the inexplicability of love, and the murderous consequences of love's absence. A masterpiece of Steinbeck's later years, *East of Eden* is a powerful and vastly ambitious novel that is at once a family saga and a modern retelling of the Book of Genesis.

***The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold**

"My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973."

So begins the story of Susie Salmon, who is adjusting to her new home in heaven, a place that is not at all what she expected, even as she is watching life on earth continue without her -- her friends trading rumors about her disappearance, her killer trying to cover his tracks, her grief-stricken family unraveling. Out of unspeakable tragedy and loss, *The Lovely Bones* succeeds, miraculously, in building a tale filled with hope, humor, suspense, even joy.

***House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton**

First published in 1905, *The House of Mirth* shocked the New York society it so deftly chronicles, portraying the moral, social and economic restraints on a woman who dared to claim the privileges of marriage without assuming the responsibilities.

Lily Bart, beautiful, witty and sophisticated, is accepted by 'old money' and courted by the growing tribe of nouveaux riches. But as she nears thirty, her foothold becomes precarious; a poor girl with expensive tastes, she needs a husband to preserve her social standing, and to maintain her in the luxury she has come to expect. Whilst many have sought her, something - fastidiousness or integrity - prevents her from making a 'suitable' match.

***Rebecca* by Daphne DuMaurier**

Ancient, beautiful Manderley, between the rose garden and the sea, is the county's showpiece. Rebecca made it so - even a year after her death, Rebecca's influence still rules there. How can Maxim de Winter's shy new bride ever fill her place or escape her vital shadow?

A shadow that grows longer and darker as the brief summer fades, until, in a moment of climatic revelations, it threatens to eclipse Manderley and its inhabitants completely...

***Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte**

Orphaned as a child, Jane has felt an outcast her whole young life. Her courage is tested once again when she arrives at Thornfield Hall, where she has been hired by the brooding, proud Edward Rochester to care for his ward Adèle. Jane finds herself drawn to his troubled yet kind spirit. She falls in love. Hard.

But there is a terrifying secret inside the gloomy, forbidding Thornfield Hall. Is Rochester hiding from Jane? Will Jane be left heartbroken and exiled once again?

***Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte**

At the center of this novel is the passionate love between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff - recounted with such emotional intensity that a plain tale of the Yorkshire moors acquires the depth and simplicity of ancient tragedy.

This best-selling Norton Critical Edition is based on the 1847 first edition of the novel. For the Fourth Edition, the editor has collated the 1847 text with several modern editions and has corrected a number of variants, including accidentals. The text is accompanied by entirely new explanatory annotations.

New to the fourth Edition are twelve of Emily Bronte's letters regarding the publication of the 1847 edition of *Wuthering Heights* as well as the evolution of the 1850 edition, prose and poetry selections by the author, four reviews of the novel, and poetry selections by the author, four reviews of the novel, and Edward Chitham's insightful and informative chronology of the creative process behind the beloved work.

Five major critical interpretations of *Wuthering Heights* are included, three of them new to the Fourth Edition. A Stuart Daley considers the importance of chronology in the novel. J. Hillis Miller examines *Wuthering Heights*'s problems of genre and critical reputation. Sandra M. Gilbert assesses the role of Victorian Christianity plays in the novel, while Martha Nussbaum traces the novel's romanticism. Finally, Lin Haire-Sargeant scrutinizes the role of Heathcliff in film adaptations of *Wuthering Heights*.

***The Color Purple* by Alice Walker**

A powerful cultural touchstone of modern American literature, *The Color Purple* depicts the lives of African American women in early twentieth-century rural Georgia. Separated as girls, sisters Celie and Nettie sustain their loyalty to and hope in each other across time, distance and silence. Through a series of letters spanning

twenty years, first from Celie to God, then the sisters to each other despite the unknown, the novel draws readers into its rich and memorable portrayals of Celie, Nettie, Shug Avery and Sofia and their experience. *The Color Purple* broke the silence around domestic and sexual abuse, narrating the lives of women through their pain and struggle, companionship and growth, resilience and bravery. Deeply compassionate and beautifully imagined, Alice Walker's epic carries readers on a spirit-affirming journey towards redemption and love.

***The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger**

Fleeing the crooks at Pencey Prep, he pinballs around New York City seeking solace in fleeting encounters—shooting the bull with strangers in dive hotels, wandering alone round Central Park, getting beaten up by pimps and cut down by erstwhile girlfriends. The city is beautiful and terrible, in all its neon loneliness and seedy glamour, its mingled sense of possibility and emptiness. Holden passes through it like a ghost, thinking always of his kid sister Phoebe, the only person who really understands him, and his determination to escape the phonies and find a life of true meaning.

The Catcher in the Rye is an all-time classic in coming-of-age literature- an elegy to teenage alienation, capturing the deeply human need for connection and the bewildering sense of loss as we leave childhood behind.

***Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens**

Great Expectations charts the progress of Pip from childhood through often painful experiences to adulthood, as he moves from the Kent marshes to busy, commercial London, encountering a variety of extraordinary characters ranging from Magwitch, the escaped convict, to Miss Havisham, locked up with her unhappy past and living with her ward, the arrogant, beautiful Estella.

Pip must discover his true self, and his own set of values and priorities. Whether such values allow one to prosper in the complex world of early **Victorian England is the** major question posed by Great Expectations, one of Dickens's most fascinating, and disturbing, novels.

***Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad**

Heart of Darkness, a novel by Joseph Conrad, was originally a three-part series in Blackwood's Magazine in 1899. It is a story within a story, following a character named Charlie Marlow, who recounts his adventure to a group of men onboard an anchored ship. The story told is of his early life as a ferry boat captain. Although his job was to transport ivory downriver, Charlie develops an interest in investing in an ivory procurement agent, Kurtz, who is employed by the government. Preceded by his reputation as a brilliant emissary of progress, Kurtz has now established himself as a god among the natives in “one of the darkest places on earth.” Marlow suspects something else of Kurtz: he has gone mad.

A reflection on corruptive European colonialism and a journey into the nightmare psyche of one of the corrupted, *Heart of Darkness* is considered one of the most influential works ever written.

***Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert**

Madame Bovary is the debut novel of French writer Gustave Flaubert, published in 1856. The character lives beyond her means in order to escape the banalities and emptiness of provincial life. When the novel was first serialized in *La Revue de Paris* between 1 October 1856 and 15 December 1856, public prosecutors attacked the novel for obscenity. The resulting trial in January 1857 made the story notorious. After Flaubert's acquittal on 7 February 1857, *Madame Bovary* became a bestseller in April 1857 when it was published in two volumes. A seminal work of literary realism, the novel is now considered Flaubert's masterpiece, and one of the most influential literary works in history.

***Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand**

On a May afternoon in 1943, an Army Air Forces bomber crashed into the Pacific Ocean and disappeared, leaving only a spray of debris and a slick of oil, gasoline, and blood. Then, on the ocean surface, a face appeared. It was that of a young lieutenant, the plane's bombardier, who was struggling to a life raft and pulling himself aboard. So began one of the most extraordinary odysseys of the Second World War.

The lieutenant's name was Louis Zamperini. In boyhood, he'd been a cunning and incorrigible delinquent, breaking into houses, brawling, and fleeing his home to ride the rails. As a teenager, he had channeled his defiance into running, discovering a prodigious talent that had carried him to the Berlin Olympics and within sight of the four-minute mile. But when war had come, the athlete had become an airman, embarking on a journey that led to his doomed flight, a tiny raft, and a drift into the unknown.

Ahead of Zamperini lay thousands of miles of open ocean, leaping sharks, a foundering raft, thirst and starvation, enemy aircraft, and, beyond, a trial even greater. Driven to the limits of endurance, Zamperini would answer desperation with ingenuity; suffering with hope, resolve, and humor; brutality with rebellion. His fate, whether triumph or tragedy, would be suspended on the fraying wire of his will.